

**STATE BAR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
HEARING DEPARTMENT – SAN FRANCISCO**

In the Matter of)	Case No. 07-N-10223-PEM
)	
GEORGE A. HARRIS III,)	
)	
Member No. 178771,)	DECISION AND ORDER OF
)	INVOLUNTARY INACTIVE
<u>A Member of the State Bar.</u>)	ENROLLMENT

I. Introduction

In this default disciplinary matter, respondent **George A. Harris III** is found culpable, by clear and convincing evidence, of failing to comply with California Rules of Court, rule 955,¹ as ordered by the California Supreme Court on April 18, 2006, in S140497.

In view of respondent's misconduct and the evidence in aggravation, the court recommends that respondent be disbarred from the practice of law.

II. Pertinent Procedural History

This proceeding was initiated by the Office of the Chief Trial Counsel of the State Bar of California (State Bar). The Notice of Disciplinary Charges (NDC) was filed and properly served via certified mail, return receipt requested, on respondent at his official membership records address on February 14, 2007. The mailing was returned as undeliverable.

Respondent's default was entered on June 20, 2007. The order of entry of default was properly mailed to respondent's official membership records address. Respondent was enrolled as

¹All references to rule 955 are to the current California Rules of Court, rule 9.20 (renumbered effective January 1, 2007). Because the misconduct occurred prior to the change in the numbering of this rule, the original numbering will be used in this decision.

an inactive member under Business and Professions Code section 6007, subdivision (e),² on June 23, 2007.

Respondent never filed a response to the NDC. (Rules Proc. of State Bar, rule 103.)

Respondent did not participate in the disciplinary proceedings. The original submission date of July 10, 2007 was vacated due to the State Bar's late filing of its brief on culpability and discipline. Thus, the matter stood submitted as of August 21, 2007.

III. Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law

All factual allegations of the NDC are deemed admitted upon entry of respondent's default unless otherwise ordered by the court based on contrary evidence. (Rules Proc. of State Bar, rule 200(d)(1)(A).)

A. Jurisdiction

Respondent was admitted to the practice of law in California on December 7, 1995, and has been a member of the State Bar since that time.

B. Violation of California Rules of Court, Rule 955

On April 18, 2006, in California Supreme Court case No. S140497 (State Bar Court case Nos. 00-O-13576 and 02-O-15061), the Supreme Court suspended respondent from the practice of law for two years, stayed the execution of the suspension, and actually suspended him for six months and until he makes restitution and until the State Bar Court grants a motion to terminate his actual suspension under rule 205 of the Rules of Procedure of the State Bar. Among other things, the Supreme Court ordered respondent to comply with rule 955(a) and (c), within 30 and 40 days, respectively, after the effective date of the Supreme Court order. The order became effective May 18, 2006, and was duly served on respondent.

Rule 955(c) mandates that respondent "file with the Clerk of the State Bar Court an affidavit showing that he . . . has fully complied with those provisions of the order entered pursuant to this rule."

²All references to sections are to the Business and Professions Code, unless otherwise indicated.

Notice of the order was properly served upon respondent. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 8.532(a).)

Respondent was to have filed the rule 955 affidavit by June 27, 2006, but to date, he has not done so and has offered no explanation to this court for his noncompliance. Whether respondent is aware of the requirements of rule 955 or of his obligation to comply with those requirements is immaterial. “Willfulness” in the context of rule 955 does not require actual knowledge of the provision which is violated. The Supreme Court has disbarred attorneys whose failure to keep their official addresses current prevented them from learning that they had been ordered to comply with rule 955. (*Powers v. State Bar* (1988) 44 Cal.3d 337, 341.)

Therefore, the State Bar has established by clear and convincing evidence that respondent willfully failed to comply with rule 955, as ordered by the Supreme Court in S140497.³

C. Violation of Business and Professions Code Section 6103

Respondent’s failure to comply with rule 955 constitutes a violation of section 6103, which requires attorneys to obey court orders and provides that the willful disobedience or violation of such orders constitutes cause for disbarment or suspension.

IV. Mitigating and Aggravating Circumstances

A. Mitigation

No mitigating evidence was offered or received. (Rules Proc. of State Bar, tit. IV, Stds. for Atty. Sanctions for Prof. Misconduct, std. 1.2(e).)⁴

B. Aggravation

There are several aggravating factors. (Std. 1.2(b).)

Respondent’s prior record of discipline is an aggravating circumstance. (Std. 1.2(b)(i).) In the underlying matter, respondent was suspended for two years, stayed, and was actually suspended for six months and until he makes restitution and until the State Bar Court terminates his actual

³Specifically, rule 955(d) provides that a suspended attorney’s willful failure to comply with rule 955 constitutes a cause for disbarment or suspension and for revocation of any pending probation.

⁴All further references to standards are to this source.

suspension under rule 205 of the Rules of Procedure of the State Bar. His misconduct included engaging in unauthorized practice of law, failure to perform services competently, failure to deposit client funds in a client trust account, improper withdrawal from employment, acts of dishonesty, failure to maintain an official address with the State Bar, failure to report judicial sanctions and failure to cooperate with the State Bar in two client matters.

Respondent demonstrated indifference toward rectification of or atonement for the consequences of his misconduct by failing to comply with rule 955(c), even after the NDC in the instant proceeding was filed. (Std. 1.2(b)(v).)

Respondent's failure to participate in this disciplinary matter prior to the entry of his default is a serious aggravating factor. (Std. 1.2(b)(vi).)

V. Discussion

Respondent's willful failure to comply with rule 955(c) is extremely serious misconduct for which disbarment is generally considered the appropriate sanction. (*Bercovich v. State Bar* (1990) 50 Cal.3d 116, 131.) Such failure undermines its prophylactic function in ensuring that all concerned parties learn about an attorney's suspension from the practice of law. (*Lydon v. State Bar* (1988) 45 Cal.3d 1181, 1187.) Respondent has demonstrated an unwillingness to comply with the professional obligations and rules of court imposed on California attorneys although he has been given opportunities to do so.

Therefore, respondent's disbarment is necessary to protect the public, the courts and the legal community, to maintain high professional standards and to preserve public confidence in the legal profession. It would undermine the integrity of the disciplinary system and damage public confidence in the legal profession if respondent were not disbarred for his willful disobedience of the Supreme Court order.

VI. Recommended Discipline

The court recommends that respondent **George A. Harris III** be disbarred from the practice of law in the State of California and that his name be stricken from the roll of attorneys in this state.

It is also recommended that the Supreme Court order respondent to comply with California Rules of Court, rule 9.20, paragraphs (a) and (c), within 30 and 40 days, respectively, of the effective

date of its order imposing discipline in this matter.⁵

VII. Costs

The court recommends that costs be awarded to the State Bar in accordance with Business and Professions Code section 6086.10 and are enforceable both as provided in section 6140.7 and as a money judgment.

VIII. Order of Involuntary Inactive Enrollment

It is ordered that respondent be transferred to involuntary inactive enrollment status under section 6007, subdivision (c)(4), and rule 220(c) of the Rules of Procedure of the State Bar. The inactive enrollment will become effective three calendar days after this order is filed.

Dated: October ___, 2007

PAT McELROY
Judge of the State Bar Court

⁵Respondent is required to file a rule 9.20(c) affidavit even if he has no clients to notify. (*Powers v. State Bar, supra*, 44 Cal.3d 337, 341.)